



# CAT

By Bastet

# CHRONICLES

A Collection of Short Stories from John Parham

The Old Man and the  
Three-Legged Goat



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## CAT CHRONICLES BY BASTET COLLECTION

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## The Old Man and the Three-Legged Goat

It was a cold fall morning, and the trees were shedding their coats. The sky cranked up its brilliance, sharpened by the cold, clear air. Curly Bama loved the park bench where he could sip his coffee, look at the crystal blue sky and stare far across the ruffled lake to the city.

He sat at the bench at least once a week, and more often when he could. Life had twists and turns, and his had more twists than turns. Peggy, the love of his life, told him they had grown apart, and she was leaving. Maybe they had. That same day, he lost his job, and now he sat in misery on this cold park bench. He sipped his hot coffee and looked across the lake and wondered what had happened to his life.

Lonely, broke and soon-to-be homeless, Curly took refuge from life on the park bench. This was his domain, and he watched as the large trees shook the summer out of their heads and shed their leaves. *My park bench and my time; just me and my thermos of hot coffee.*

Curly sat there and let his confused emotions escape to the cold air, trying to find answers to his life. He was twenty-six and still young but on his own. His parents had been killed several years ago in a horrible automobile accident and he lived far from any remaining relatives. He sipped his coffee and mused; even Peggy was now out of his life, although he was not sure how bad that was.

Curly thought of his dismal future and sipped his coffee. He tried to weigh his options for tomorrow and beyond. Today was a bad dream, and he welcomed the clean and chilly air as it revived his spirit.

Curly took another sip of coffee and watched an old man shuffle by wearing a trench coat and a fedora and smoking a pipe with little clouds of smoke floating into the air. He shuffled a few yards, hesitated, turned around and came back toward him.

He didn't want to have his remorseful day interrupted, but Mr. Interruption was coming his way regardless of his wishes. Curly's parents taught him to respect folks, especially the elderly. He looked at the old man and asked, "May I help you?"

The old man halted a couple feet from the bench and replied, "Excuse me sir, but perhaps you may have seen a three-legged goat pass by?"

On any other day that might have sounded strange, but today, it fit right in. He was sitting all broken-hearted and feeling sorry for himself, but the old man had jerked him back to reality. *A three-legged goat? Who has a three-legged goat for a pet,* Curly wondered.

"No sir, I have not," he replied. He looked more at the old man. Little wisps of breath floated from his mouth as he breathed out into the cold air.

He felt sorry for the old man and asked, "Would you like to have a cup of hot coffee and sit with me?"

The old man walked up, extended his hand and said, "Pleased to meet you. I am Bartholomew Jackson."

Curly shook his cold hard hand and replied, "Nice to meet you. They call me Curly Bama. Please sit and I will pour you a cup of coffee, then tell me about the three-legged goat." He had brought a full thermos of

coffee; it was one of few luxuries he could still afford.

Bartholomew seated himself. Curly poured the coffee into the thermos cap and handed it to him. He said, "Bless you, Curly. I am freezing looking for Rambo." He took a long sip of the hot coffee.

Curly sat there and looked long and hard at the old man and realized he liked him. He was not sure why since he had met him only five minutes ago, but he made him feel secure. It reminded him of his mom picking him up with a scraped knee saying, "Everything will be okay." He had always believed her.

That is what he felt with Bartholomew sitting next to him. It was uncomfortable, yet it gave him a warm, relaxed feeling he had been missing for so long.

"So Bartholomew, what is the story on the three-legged goat?" he asked.

The old man turned to Curly and held the thermos metal cup between his calloused hands. He said, "Rambo saved my life and I must find him. I am indebted to do so. Besides, he is my life companion."

Bartholomew looked across the lake with great sadness. He turned to Curly and said, "I used to go to the mountains in search for gold. I never expected to find any, but it kept me busy as I had no family or kin to visit.

"Some days, I got lucky and found gems, agates, turquoise, amethyst and such." He perked up and said, "I sold gems for a pretty penny, I must tell you!

"Anyway, one fine day, I went way deeper in the mountains than ever before and figured I would find the mother lode of something. I scrambled across a rough and steep ravine when I slipped and fell. I landed at the bottom of the ravine, struck a rock and everything went black."

"It was like I was swimming in a fish bowl looking out to see from within. Do you know what I mean?" the old man asked.

Curly shook his head in agreement, but he'd never had any experiences in a fish bowl.

He continued, "I lay unconscious for a long time and was brought back to life by a loud bleating sound. I thought I was delirious and attempted to shut the sound out, but I heard it again, only louder this time.

"I forced my eyes open, and a black goat stared at me with a white patch on his forehead. I attempted to sit up and fell back but tried one more time with success. This time, the goat assisted me by pulling on my sleeve to help get me up.

"I got on my knees and the goat scooted under my arm to assist. I stood up on my legs, but they felt like they were made of jelly. I turned around to take inventory of where I was, but I was still too much in a fog to know.

"The goat bleated and walked five or ten yards then came back and repeated. After a few times, my addled mind understood he wanted me to follow him.

"The goat led me out of the ravine. Near the exit, hidden behind some large boulders, was a natural spring. By then, I understood he was trying to lead me to water.

“I fell face first into the life-giving spring. It was a hot day, and I had not noticed how dehydrated I was. I drank the cool, sweet water and revived somewhat,” the old man said.

“My savior, the goat, lay before me and stared at me with crazy eyes. The eyes were a cool blue with glittering sparkles in them.” The old man turned towards Curly and said, “If you gaze into my hazel eyes, you may see the same golden flecks.”

Curly focused on the old man’s eyes and sure enough, he saw the golden flecks. He thought this was one weird story, but he also felt better having listened to Bartholomew’s story. “So, what happened next to you and the goat?” Curly asked. He refilled the old man’s coffee cup since he had drank the coffee.

The old man took a sip and continued, “I felt much better and could stand up with sturdier legs. Other than some crusted blood on my forehead, I felt great. I looked down at the goat and asked, ‘Where to now?’

“The goat bleated a couple times and started down the ravine. Every couple minutes, he would stop, look back and bleat again,” the old man continued.

““Oh, so you want me to follow you, right?” I asked. ‘You know I fell off a cliff, not a turnip truck!’ I yelled, but I followed him. Several minutes later, we walked out of the ravine and came to a place with small shrubs. The goat sniffed and investigated the shrubs.

“All I could see was Rambo’s hindquarters as he poked through the dense shrubs. Then I heard a sound I will never forget. There was a loud clang then a sickening bone-crunching sound. Rambo screamed, not like a goat but more like a mother losing her only begotten child.

“I rushed the best I could the fifty yards to Rambo and found his leg caught in a wolf trap. His left leg was almost severed and his tongue flopped around his mouth as he squealed. I opened the trap to free him and wrapped his limp body in my coat.

“I tried to staunch the bleeding leg best I could, and we left that cold-hearted ravine. When we exited the ravine, I knew our location and carried Rambo the two miles to my truck. I placed Rambo in the passenger side floorboard and drove as fast as I could to connect with US 69.

“I turned left and headed to Dumas as fast as the old truck would go. Rambo lay in a growing pool of blood, and I prayed Dumas would have a vet. I was sure there would be a vet clinic since it was a small mid-size town. And sure enough, I found the Dumas Animal Hospital on Main Street and pulled into the parking lot, screeching to a halt.

“I picked Rambo up from the floorboard, terrified he was dead. He had lost so much blood and felt like a limp, stuffed animal. Here is where I caught a break: I believe the greatest vet in the world worked at that animal hospital that day. Because of Rambo’s weak condition, she immediately tended to him.

“Dr. Jessica Ellen went right to work on Rambo. She placed him in a small room and prepped him for surgery to address his wound. I waited in the lobby for what seemed like an eternity. She advised me before the surgery that the chances of Rambo surviving were slim, but she would try her best.

“After what seemed like hours, Dr. Ellen came out, looked at me and said, ‘You have one tough billy goat, Mr. Jackson! The surgery went well, but I had to amputate the rest of his limb. The good news is goats adapt well to missing limbs, and I expect for him to recover.’

“I did not know what to say. I had only met the billy goat a few hours earlier. But I felt a *binding*, or a unique connection with him. I sensed there was just something special he had, and I felt it. I thanked Dr. Ellen profusely, paid my bill and drove around back to pick up the goat.

“I placed the goat on the seat. The vet had wrapped him in a blanket and was thankful he was not bleeding. He was still under sedation from the surgery and seemed to be resting or soundly asleep. Dr. Ellen had taken time to create a list of items I needed to pick up to take care of the goat, along with the proper care instructions.

“I glanced down at the floorboard at the thick pool of blood as it slowly congealed. I was not concerned with cleaning up the blood and thought I would take care of that later. I stopped on the way home to purchase the supplies instructed by Dr. Ellen for the goat. We continued to my house, and I said to the still sleeping goat, ‘I shall name you Rambo because you are one tough goat!’”

Curly asked, “Did you have anywhere to keep him at your place?”

Bartholomew replied, “No, but I thought I could make something work. I had a large back porch and a fenced backyard.” He continued with his story after taking another sip of coffee.

“I made a makeshift bed for Rambo on the back porch. I thought he would be safe there, and the weather was hot with warm nights. I checked on Rambo every few hours to make sure he had plenty of water and the prescribed food.

“A couple days later, I sat on the porch and Rambo bleated and struggled to rise. That caught me by surprise. He then staggered over and rubbed his head against my knee. He still wobbled with only one front leg but it did not take him long to discover centering his front leg would allow him to gain stability. No more rock wall climbing for him, but it was good enough.

“The days went by and our *binding* became much stronger. I never played the state lotto but sitting on the porch with Rambo, I had the urge to buy a ticket. I made sure Rambo was okay and drove to the local Quick Stop and purchased a million-dollar lotto ticket.

“The next day, I discovered I won the lottery! I celebrated with Rambo. I swear he winked at me for my great fortune. I took proceeds and had a small cottage made for him in the backyard with automated food and water dispensers.

“We were both happy and sat on the porch and enjoyed life. I was now rich beyond my wildest desires, and Rambo chewed on his favorite cans. Life was ideal, my health was even improving and Rambo was strong and playful.

“Then late one night, a huge thunderstorm passed over with damaging winds. The winds knocked down the fence, and Rambo reacted naturally and fled. That was two days ago, and I have yet to find him.”

Curly felt immensely sad for the lonely man and could relate to his loneliness. He too had just lost

someone, so he sympathized with Bartholomew.

"I wish there was something I could do for you, Bartholomew," Curly said. "Would you like for me to go with you to search for Rambo? I have nothing else to do today or tomorrow."

Bartholomew looked at Curly and handed him the coffee cup and said, "No Curly, this is my quest. And it was nice of you to offer a cold old man a cup of hot coffee and to listen to his story.

"Thank you for your kindness Curly, but I shall go alone," Bartholomew said. "But here is my card in case you happen to see Rambo. I would like to give you \$100 for caring and for offering help to find Rambo. Since I won the lottery, I now have more money than I will ever spend by myself."

Curly held his hand up and said, "No, you don't owe me anything. I wish I could do more for you." Although a hundred dollars would be a small fortune to Curly at this point in his life, he thought it would not be right to take the old man's money in his time of grief. That was not the way his parents raised him.

Bartholomew replied, "I bought this lotto ticket the other day before Rambo escaped and have not bothered to check on it. At least accept this. I am sure it is not worth anything, but who knows until you check it?"

Bartholomew handed his card with the lotto ticket wrapped around it too Curly. He retrieved his wallet and placed the card and ticket in it and said to Bartholomew, "I hope you find Rambo, and the best of luck. You are a good man."

Bartholomew smiled at Curly and shook his hand warmly. He pulled his fedora lower, lit his pipe and continued on his search. Curly decided it was time to head back to his apartment and ponder what to do for his future.

The next day, Curly woke late in the morning and knew he had about a week before he would be on the street. He looked into the mirror for answers but found none. He only saw a lonely and sad face staring back at him. He pulled out his wallet to take inventory of his financial situation.

He laid the contents on the table and counted out \$35 dollars. *That's it*, he thought, *my entire fortune and life savings. What to do*, he wondered, *what to do?* While he fretted over his situation, he glanced in his wallet and saw Bartholomew's card. He realized he had never read it.

He extracted the card from the wallet, removed the lotto ticket and read the card's inscription. He expected to see a name and maybe an address or phone number, but what he read baffled him.

The card said: *Bartholomew Jackson -Angel of Life-Savior of Souls.*

That was all that was on it except for a picture of Bartholomew wearing his fedora with his pipe and Rambo. Curly thought Bartholomew was a little different, but the card inscription was more than his fragile psyche could handle right then.

He picked up and unfolded the lotto ticket. The draw date was two days ago, so he thought, *what the hell?* He would check it. The winning numbers he found on the internet were 2-8-23-26-41-54. Curly looked at the lotto ticket numbers. He had a double take as his heart raced, since his lotto ticket had 2-8-23-26-41-54.

"Holy cow!" Curly shouted at the top of his lungs. "Bartholomew gave me a winning million-dollar lotto

ticket!”

Curly jumped up so fast he nearly passed out, when he heard a strange sound out his open window. He staggered over to the window left partially open for the breeze and heard a strange bleating sound. The sound was like a woman screaming.

He looked down at the sidewalk beneath his window and saw an old man wearing a fedora with a pipe. Next to him was a three-legged goat; they both looked up at him. The old man tweaked his fedora at Curly and the goat pranced once, then they both turned and disappeared around the corner.

Curly yelled down to them, “Wait, please wait!” but it was too late; they were gone.

He ran down the stairs as fast as he could, turned right and spun around the corner. A long alley presented itself without an exit, but there was not an old man or a three-legged goat anywhere. Curly was dumbfounded. What had happened to them? How could they have disappeared?

A strong gust of warm wind came up the alley and blew over Curly as he heard a loud bleating sound before the wind dissipated into the sky.

THE END